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DAVIE

U.S. 441 renewal plan wins approval

Currently home to junkyards and warehouses, U.S. 441 in Davie may someday become a bustling urban neighborhood with condos, shops and offices.

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Someday, wide, bike-friendly brick sidewalks will line Davie's stretch of U.S. 441. A mix of shops, cafes and affordable condos will enliven the streetscape, and residents will rely on transit to take them to work.

That future is several years away, but, the Davie Town Council has approved a master plan that brings the town closer to its vision for a redeveloped, revitalized 441.

Throughout South Florida, communities are working to reinvent 441. The regional effort, led by the South Florida Planning Council and the State Route 7 Collaborative, aims to develop a true transit corridor that will help the area manage growth in the years to come.

"It's not just looking at Davie's needs, it's looking at what's needed for the region to grow," said Marcie Nolan, planning supervisor for the town.

Davie's segment of 441 is one of the largest in Broward County, and its master plan will allow more than 6,200 residences, with 15 percent designated as affordable or workforce housing. The plan also calls for commercial and light industrial uses, as well as mixed-use developments and residential density that can support public transit.

The redeveloped stretch of 441 will still feel like Davie, though Florida's Turnpike cuts the area off from the rest of the town, said Nolan. The town's linear park, which runs along the C-11 canal, continues out to 441, and plans call for more green space branching off the park. Many other spaces will incorporate nature into an urban landscape.

"When you're in Davie, you're aware of your outside environment. We're bringing that feel to the east, which has traditionally been more urban," Nolan said.

Davie Mayor Tom Truex, who initially expressed reservations about the plan, complimented town staff and residents for creating a plan that he feels will respect the town's identity and character.

He cited a part of the plan that allows the council to establish a boundary, similar to the Urban Development Boundary in Miami-Dade County, that would prohibit high-density development from spreading into semi-rural neighborhoods in the central and western sections of the town.

"My fear is that if we open up this increased density in one area, it will inevitably creep out," Truex said. "This boundary is a concept where you agree upfront `this is a line that won't be crossed.' "

The boundary is an unusual idea that hasn't been tried in Broward, Truex said.

"The whole county is in a crash course with development. If we don't come up with some new ways of doing things, it's not going to be a place that's desirable to live in," he said.

All the land along Davie's portion of 441 is privately owned, and the plan was devised with land owners' help, Nolan said.

On Wednesday night, attorneys for some land owners in the area, including the Forman family, which owns several parcels and a recycling facility, encouraged the council to vote for the plan.

As approved, the plan gives land owners more uses for their land, allowing owners to build according to market demand.

"You need to have the flexibility to respond to the market, something government doesn't typically do well," Nolan said.

The plan now goes to the Broward Planning Council, then to the County Commission. If approved, the plan will be sent to the state for review, and it must pass the Regional Planning Council and other agencies. Nolan said she expects the plan back in March 2007.

Groundbreaking won't begin until 2010 at the earliest, and significant changes aren't likely to happen until 2015, said Ken Cohen, Davie's acting town administrator.

"It seems like a long time but isn't really that long," he said.

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